FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

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Since 1949 the purpose of Fellowship in Prayer is to promote the practice of prayer among all religious faiths whose fundamental belief is in God regardless of race, creed, or color, and whose tenets include the universal attributes of truth, honesty, justice, and mercy, that thereby there may arise a closer relation to Almighty God and a deeper spirit of fellowship among mankind.

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Cover Photograph by Brooks Walsh

Recently, I read Father Matthew Fox's new book, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* (Harper & Row: San Francisco, 1988). It moved me deeply—especially since, in conjunction with Fellowship in Prayer's 40th anniversary in June of 1990, we are planning a Worldwide Day of Prayer and Meditation to Help Heal Mother Earth.

Father Fox quotes Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), abbess of two Benedictine monasteries and a renowned doctor, poet, musician, and mystic: "The earth is at the same time mother of all, for contained in her are the seeds of all." If, as all religions teach, we are all brothers and sisters, how goes it with our mother? Mother Earth? The facts seem unarguable. Mother Earth is dying. We are killing her. As reported by Father Fox, agricultural practices in North America today destroy topsoil—the matrix of all our lives—at the rate of six billion tons per year (It takes God and nature 10,000 years, Father Fox notes, to produce one inch of topsoil). The world's forests are rapidly being destroyed. At the present rate of destruction, one third of the planet's total will be destroyed in the next fifteen years.

Then consider water: holy, holy water. Without it, we'd all be dead in a matter of days. In the United States alone, we dump eighty billion pounds of toxic waste into Mother Earth's lifeblood—her water—annually. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that there are 50,000 toxic dump sites in our country currently leaking nuclear and other poisonous wastes into Mother Earth. In the last twenty-five years, serious birth defects have doubled world-wide, yet we continue dumping/pumping poisonous chemicals into the soil, air, and water. Listen again to Hildegard of Bingen as she declared prophetically: "The earth should not be injured! The earth must not be destroyed! As often as the elements of the air are violated by ill-treatment, so God will cleanse them. God will cleanse them through the sufferings and hardships of humankind. All of creation God gives to humankind to use. But if this privilege is misused, then God's justice permits creation to punish humanity."

Seven centuries later, in 1852, Chief Seattle, an American Indian

leader, answered a United States demand that he sell his tribal lands to the government with these unforgettable words:

"Every part of this earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every meadow, every humming insect. All are holy in the memory and experience of my people.

"The rivers are our brothers. They quench our thirst. They carry our canoes and feed our children. So you must give to the rivers the kindness you would give any brother.

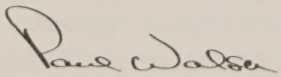
"Remember that the air is precious to us, that the air shares its spirit with all the life it supports. The wind that gave our grandfather his first breath also receives his last sigh. The wind also gives our children the spirit of life.

"Will you teach your children what we have taught our children, that the earth is our mother? What befalls the earth befalls all the sons and daughters of the earth.

"This we know: the earth does not belong to us, we belong to the earth. All things are connected like the blood that unites us all. We did not weave the web of life, we are merely a strand in it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.

"One thing we know: our God is also your God. The earth is precious to God and to harm the earth is to heap contempt on its creator."

There is much we can do—we must do—to help heal Mother Earth before it is too late. As individuals, we must become more aware of how we, our corporations, and our governments constantly poison, pollute, and ravish the environment. We must become informed about actions we can take—in our homes, on the job, in the polling booth—to cleanse and purify our earth, water, and air so they become once again what God intended for us and for our children. Let us put our prayers to work to help bring about the spiritual renaissance that is essential to the healing of Mother Earth.



Paul Walsh
President
Fellowship in Prayer, Inc.

You must have a room, or a certain hour or so a day, where you don't know what was in the newspapers that morning, you don't know who your friends are, you don't know what you owe anybody, you don't know what anybody owes to you. This is a place where you can simply experience and bring forth what you are and what you might be. This is the place of creative incubation. At first you may find that nothing happens there. But if you have a sacred place and use it, something eventually will happen.

I will participate in the game (of life). It is a wonderful, wonderful opera—except that it hurts.

The cross has to be looked on as a sign of an eternal affirmation of all that ever was or ever shall be. It symbolizes not only the one historic moment on Calvary but the mystery through all time and space of God's presence and participation in the agony of all living things.

Once a Zen master stood up before his students and was about to deliver a sermon. Just as he was about to open his mouth, a bird sang. And he said, "The sermon has been delivered."

The way to find out about your happiness is to keep your mind on the moments when you feel most happy—not excited, not just thrilled, but deeply happy. This requires a little bit of self-analysis. What is it that makes you happy? Stay with it, no matter what people tell you. This is what I call "following your bliss."

An intense experience of mystery is what one has to regard as the ultimate religious experience.

Love thine enemies, because they are the instruments of your destiny.

Experienced participation in the suffering of another person, that's the beginning of humanity.

Joseph Campbell, who devoted much of his life to the study of mythology, is best known for his book, The Power of Myth.

The Law of Karma

EKNATH EASWARAN

"Anger is its own punishment. Selfishness is its own punishment." And the love that leads us to live for others brings the reward of a healthy peace of mind. This fascinating, modern interpretation of the law of karma will appeal to people of any spiritual viewpoint, faith, or philosophy.

Many years ago, when I was still a Fulbright scholar at the University of California, Berkeley, I gave a talk on meditation to some hard-headed Kaiser Aluminum executives in Oakland. After I finished, one of these men came up and said, "You know, we Americans are scientifically minded, and it goes against the grain when you talk about spiritual 'laws.' These are just beliefs, and we Westerners don't necessarily subscribe to them. Shouldn't you say something vaguer, like 'spiritual principles'?"

I motioned him over to a big plate-glass window where we could look down from the Kaiser building onto Lake Merritt, hundreds of feet below. "Would you like to see something spectacular?" I asked. "I'm going to soar out of this window and take a spin around the lake."

"Don't do it!" he said, grabbing my arm in alarm. "Haven't you heard of the law of gravity?"

"I've heard of it," I agreed, "but I don't subscribe to it, so it has no effect on me. After all, it's not a *Hindu* law."

"Whether you believe in it or not," he retorted, "the law of gravity works."

"Similarly," I said, "whether anyone believes in it or not, the law of karma works. If you live in harmony with it, it will support you. But just as with gravity, if you go against it, you have to expect some painful, predictable consequences."

The law of karma is central to Hindu and Buddhist thought, but it is not a tenet of any religion; it is a law of life. No one has expressed it more succinctly than Jesus: "As ye sow, so shall ye reap."

Put universally, the law of karma expresses the central truth that all of

Eknath Easwaran, founder and director of the Blue Mountain Center of Meditation, has been teaching meditation and the classics of world mysticism to an American audience for twenty-five years. His books include Conquest of Mind, Mantram Handbook, Dialogue With Death, Gandhi the Man, *and* Meditation: An Eight-Point Program.

life is one. This means that, just as in physics, everything is interconnected, from the world of things to the world of thoughts. Everything we do or say or even think has consequences, good or bad, according to whether we have acted in harmony with the rest of life or at odds with it. When we act in such a way that others benefit from our action, we too reap some of the benefit, for we are part of the whole. But if we do something at cost to others, we reap some of the costs ourselves as well. Put bluntly, selfish behavior has painful consequences: if not immediately, then in the fullness of time.

It is worth stressing that this punishment need not be regarded as

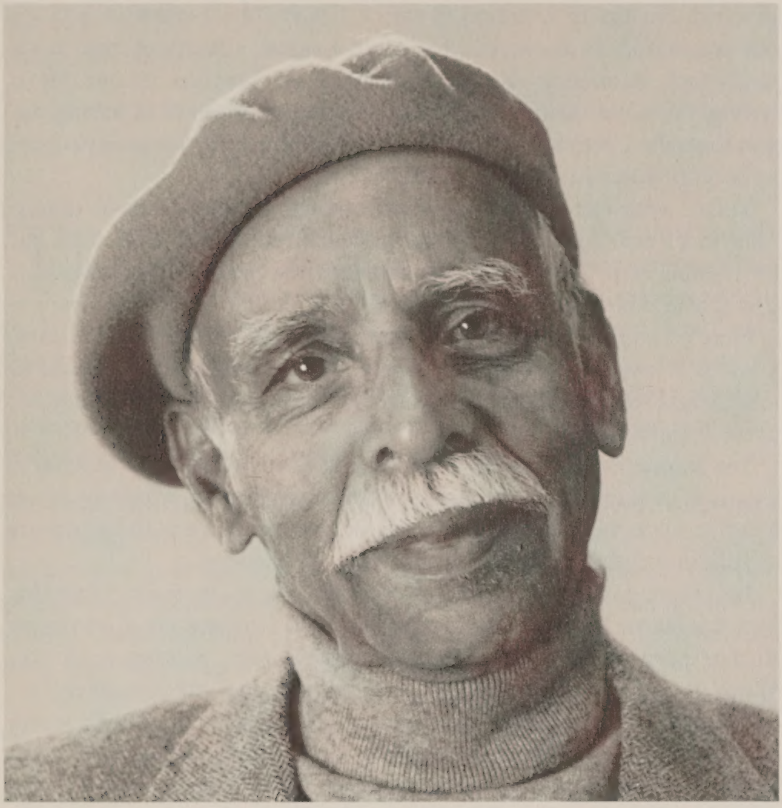
The tragedy is not our making mistakes, but making mistakes without learning from them. Suffering is a simple guidepost on the road of life, meant to keep us from running into a disastrous end.

meted out by some external Lawgiver. As the Buddha would say, anger is its own punishment. Selfishness is its own punishment. The Lord is within us, and when we suffer the consequences of selfish behavior—emotional problems, estrangement, alienation, ill health—it is we who are punishing ourselves.

We associate the Lord with love, so we find it difficult to understand that a certain amount of suffering in life is not only inescapable but even necessary for growth. In fairness, the conditioning of pleasure and personal satisfaction is so strong that without making mistakes and learning from them, I think very few human beings can be expected to understand where selfish desires lead. The tragedy is not our making mistakes, but making mistakes without learning from them. Suffering is a simple guidepost on the road of life, meant to keep us from running into a disastrous end.

It took me a long time to understand this, though my spiritual teacher, my grandmother, tried to teach me very early in life. When I made a mistake and suffered for it, she would not be very sympathetic. She didn't gloat over my suffering or withdraw her support, but in wordless ways, mostly by her own example, she helped me to learn not to make that mistake again.

At the time, I didn't understand what seemed a strange lack of sym-



Eknath Easwaran

pathy from one who loved me so deeply. Today I know that if someone has been behaving selfishly, it is much better for that person to suffer the consequences and learn to change than it is to remain blind and fail to grow.

Without this painful aspect of the unity of life, unfortunately, few of us would grow. It is not much of a compliment to human nature, but most of us do not learn from pleasure; we learn from making mistakes and suffering the consequences.

Every day I see the verification of the law of karma. Ill health is often an instance: if we do not take care of our body and maintain our peace

of mind, our health is bound to suffer. When our digestion is upset or our equanimity is destroyed, it is often a signal, a warning from body and mind, reminding us that something fundamental in our life is wrong. Pain, illness, insecurity, and mental turmoil can all be loving signals from the Lord within, who is telling us, "It's time you gave yourself a checkup. Something you're doing isn't right."

Today, with our psychological orientation, we may want to object, "But that's not fair! All our biological conditioning tells us to look out for number one. Do we have to suffer the consequences of unconscious drives over which we have no control?"

Here we see the Lord's infinite compassion. On the one hand, he says, a law is a law. Selfish behavior *has* to have consequences. We need to understand and accept that, just as when we let go of a ball in midair, we know it has to fall.

Yet despite this, we *do* have a choice in how we act. That is what it means to be human. The burden of selfish conditioning, which everyone bears in some measure, begins to fall away when we heed the signposts of suffering and live for other rather than for ourselves.

In this way, we learn the lesson that suffering has to teach. Once this lesson is learned completely, the mystics of all religions say, it serves no further purpose. Suffering is an educational tool, a learning device. When we realize the unity of life, personal suffering comes to an end.

Every religion teaches the same lesson: do not follow self-will; it will only lead to sorrow. When we live just for ourselves, riding roughshod over others' feelings to get what we want, life itself will ensure that we get increasing insecurity, ill health, and loneliness; there is no other way of awakening our sensitivity. On the other hand, when we open our hearts to the needs of those around us, we get the equivalent of a divine pat on the back: increasing health, vitality, security, and self-respect.

In the end, then, there is nothing fatalistic about the law of karma. Rightly understood, nothing is more positive, for it brings every possibility of spiritual growth into our own hands.

Question-and-Answer Prayer

CANDIDA PALMER

This Quaker writer finds her prayer-questions in the Bible, but the Scriptures of any religion could be used in this method of spiritual growth.

The Bible can be experienced as story book, the God-story Book, that continues to reveal God to human understanding. One strand in this richly woven God-story comes in questions which the Holy One addresses to us in what I like to call the "Holy Now," our present, personal situation. Our prayer times can become moments of attentiveness in our Holy Now, and as we listen, we may hear again old questions newly addressed to each of us. To begin with, here are a few of the God-questions that are part of the God-story.

GENESIS 3:8-12. WHERE ARE YOU, ADAM? Adam, addressed thus by God in the garden, has something to hide. He is caught in a confusion of guilt and shame, wrongdoing, fear, and probably also regret. Hiding and blaming Eve or the serpent for his own misstep doesn't remove God's searching question. In his confusion about what he has done, his relationship with God becomes clouded.

Where are you?: is also God's question to each of us, challenging us to come out of hiding, expose our fear and weakness, and look God in the eye. It is the perennial challenge to veracity, openness, and soundness in the inner and outer "face" we choose to show, and what the inner face of God really perceives. Our prayer, then, might be "In the Holy Now, shine your divine and ever-revealing Light on the shame, guilt, fear, and confusion that make me want to hide from you and from people. I long for a greater authenticity, face to face with my God."

GENESIS 4:9. WHERE IS YOUR BROTHER ABEL? God faces Cain with the murder of his brother. God's question here probes the intimate

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relationship of family and blood relatives. Cain counters with his own inimitable question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" We know Cain's response so well that we tend to apply it to the realm of universal brotherhood: Yes, we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, be they the homeless in our cities or the starving children in the Sudan. Yes, we answer, we are one another's keeper. Closer to home, though, we tend to flinch when the question focuses on family members, in their old age or their infancy; aging in-laws discarded with a discarded spouse; or children who have direct claims on our economic, emotional, and parental support. Remember how Jesus answers a similar question: Who is my neighbor?

In our time for prayer and reflection, we might hear this question again, "Where, in the Holy Now, is my 'brother Abel'?" "Who is my 'Brother Abel'?" "Who is my neighbor?"

"Lord, shine your Holy Light on these my closest relationships today and every day."

The more we pray in this question and answer mode, the more light will fall on those perplexing inner places God is trying to address.

SAMUEL 3:1-18. "SAMUEL, SAMUEL!" A VOICE CALLS IN THE NIGHT. "Here I am," answers the boy Samuel who lay sleeping in the temple where he is an altar boy. Groggy with sleep, he hastens to the bedside of his old master, Eli, but Eli hadn't called him. A second time Samuel wakes when he hears someone calling for him, "Samuel, Samuel." Again he responds immediately with "Here I am," and hastens to the side of Eli. That time Eli surmises it is Yahweh calling the boy, and tells Samuel how to answer should he hear the voice again. Again he wakes hearing the voice calling, and this time Samuel answers as instructed, "Speak, Yahweh, thy servant is listening." And here begins Samuel's long service as God's special prophet priest.

In prayer we can test where such a question might have been addressed to us. What could have been asked of us? What is being asked of us now? In reflection and prayer we ask God to unstop the "ears" of our heart to become attentive, receptive listeners for God's specific word to us; that we may hear the call, and like Samuel grasp it and say, "Here I am. Speak, your servant is listening."

JOB 38:1. "WHO IS THIS OBSCURING MY DESIGNS WITH HIS EMPTY-HEADED WORDS? . . . NOW IT IS MY TURN TO ASK YOU [JOB] QUESTIONS." God's long string of questions (chapters 38-42) builds to a tempestuous crescendo in Job's discourse with Yahweh. It is a scene in Job's arduous faith journey that needs little expolation, as if Yahweh were saying "Check mate!" In the words of Job's final concession to God's might and glory, he says "I am the person who obscured your designs with my empty-headed words. I knew you then only by hearsay, but now I have seen you with my own eyes." Let us formulate our own prayer: Help me today to move into greater unity with your holy purposes for me and for your world.

LUKE 11:9. "WHICH PARENT AMONG YOU WOULD HAND THIS CHILD A STONE WHEN ASKED FOR BREAD?" We might rewrite that question for ourselves thus: "Who among you, when your son or daughter asks for a deep, authentic response and involvement (on the feeling level), hands out stony silence (withdrawal or denial)? God isn't like that, either, Jesus teaches his disciples, God is a loving spirit-parent to us. Such loving parent images are particularly difficult to relate to for many who have no firsthand experience of loving parents; who may have known abuse, violence, or abandonment. As author Samuel Osherman reminds us in his book, *Finding our Fathers* (Fawcett, p. 224) we may be sitting on a "psychological timebomb" as more and more children after the divorce of their parents grow up having little or no meaningful contact with the absent parent, most often their father.

In prayer, in the Now, we ask God's help to open those deep channels of nurture that our children and other loved ones ask of us. We ask the Holy Spirit to free those channels of the anger, selfishness, disappointment, and our own woundedness that may long have clogged them. May our love flow in a new, clear stream to those who ask it of us.

REVELATION 3:20. HE STANDS AT THE DOOR, KNOCKING. The insistent knocking at our inner door is God's asking for admittance. Are we eager to welcome this guest? Hospitality often means that we change our schedule and routine, rearrange the furniture, and make room in our lives for the guest. This well-known request for "hospitality" from Revelation 3 has captured the imagination of Christians through the ages. One of the stories about Abraham also tells of his response to such a request (Genesis 18:1-15). Here Yahweh asks him, "Where is

Paul M. Schrock

your wife Sarah?" for he had a special message for Sarah that she could hardly believe.

As you go through your daily routine today, listen for the knocking at your inner door; listen to the guest who enters and sups with you.

JOHN 21:15-17. "PETER, SON OF JOHN, DO YOU LOVE ME?" This poignant question occurs three times in the last chapter of John's Gospel. Jesus is addressing Peter who becomes a bit testy to be asked the same question for the third time. Jesus charges him every time with what it means to love: It means tending the "lambs and sheep" of this world, a ministry to the weak and defenseless: it is another form of the Great Commission that concludes Matthew's gospel—Go into all the world and tend my lambs and sheep.

There are other God-questions to ponder, or you may find a reading that forms itself into a question as you pray. The more we pray in this question and answer mode, the more light will fall on those perplexing inner places God is trying to address. Here is a simple exercise to incorporate into your prayer times:

Let a God-question address your prayer. Write it down. Underneath write a response that comes to you spontaneously. Invite the Spirit into this Holy Now by formulating a new question from the answer that came to you to the first one. Repeat this a few times, using the new answer to form a new question. Meditate on these questions and answers briefly. Then write down one word or point of new resonance that has emerged out of your prayer questions. Hold this with you all day or week.

A personal question "path" opened for me recently as a result of a quote from another part of the God-story: Paul, harking back to Abraham and the Israelites, explains to church members in Rome the ongoing part of the Jews in God's story, Paul affirms unequivocally, "For God's gift and calling are irrevocable." This spoke to me at some personal 'crossroads' level and soon other God-questions began to surface, one after another: what were the gifts and the calling for Adam? For Cain and Abel? For Abraham? For Samuel and Peter and Paul and John of Patmos? What gifts and callings have I acknowledged in my life? Do I own them as God-given and irrevocable?

The more we pray in this question/answer dialogue, the more light will fall on the inner places that particularly need to surface. Can we end with asking the Holy Spirit to visit us with the questions we need to hear again, and need to answer again.

Dowa

Save me, my Lord, from the earthly passions and the attachments which blind mankind.
Save me, my Lord, from the temptations of power, fame, and wealth, which keep man away from Thy glorious vision.
Save me, my Lord, from the souls who are constantly occupied in hurting and harming their fellow man, and who take pleasure in the pain of another.
Save me, my Lord, from the evil eye of envy and jealousy, which falleth upon Thy bountiful gifts.
Save me, my Lord, from falling into the hands of the playful children of earth, lest they might use me in their games; they might play with me and then break me in the end, as children destroy their toys.
Save me, my Lord, from all manner of injury that cometh from the bitterness of my adversaries and from the ignorance of my loving friends.

Nayaz

Beloved Lord, Almighty God!
Through the rays of the Sun.
Through the waves of the air.
Through the All-pervading Life in space.
Purify and revivify me, and, I pray,
Heal my body, heart, and soul.
Amen.

Rasul

Warner of coming dangers.
Wakener of the world from sleep.
Deliverer of the Message of God.

Hazrat Inayt Kahn is the founder of the Sufi Order in the West. His prayers, from the early part of this century, represent what he felt was the aspiration of humanity as it moved toward a global spiritual consciousness.

Thou art our Savior.
The Sun at the dawn of creation.
The Light of the whole universe.
The Fulfillment of God's Purpose.
Thou the Life Eternal, we seek refuge in thy loving enfoldment.
Spirit of Guidance, Source of all beauty, and Creator of harmony.
Love, Lover, and Beloved Lord.
Thou art our Divine Ideal.

Nabi

A torch in the darkness, a staff during my weakness,
A rock in the weariness of life.
Thou, my Master, makest earth a Paradise.
Thy thought giveth me unearthly joy.
Thy light illumineth my life's path.
Thy words inspire me with divine wisdom.
I follow in thy footsteps, which lead me to the eternal goal.
Comforter of the broken-hearted.
Support of those in need.
Friend of the lovers of Truth.
Blessed Master, thou art the Prophet of God.

Pir

Inspirer of my mind, consoler of my heart, healer of my spirit,
Thy presence lifteth me from earth to Heaven:
Thy words flow as the sacred river:
Thy thought riseth as a divine spring:
Thy tender feelings waken sympathy in my heart.
Beloved Teacher, thy very being is forgiveness.
The clouds of doubt and fear are scattered by thy piercing glance.
All ignorance vanishes in thy illuminating presence;
A new hope is born in my heart by breathing thy peaceful atmosphere.
O inspiring Guide through life's puzzling ways.
In thee I feel abundance of blessing.

The Religious Character of America

GEORGE GALLUP

Certain basic themes emerge from the mass of survey data collected over the period of five decades, themes that probably apply not only to the 50-year history of scientific polling, but to the history of the nation:

The widespread appeal or popularity of religion
The gap between belief and commitment; between high religiosity and low ethics
The glaring lack of knowledge
What would appear to be a failure, in part, of organized religion to make a difference in society in terms of morality and ethics
The superficiality of faith.

The last item is underscored by the survey finding that only about 1 person in 10 (according to the Gallup Spiritual Commitment Scale) falls into the category of "highly spiritually committed." Another 4 in 10 are in the moderately committed group, while half are either in the fairly low or very low commitment group.

Furthermore, a 1982 Gallup survey for the *Christian Broadcasting Network* found that while high levels of religious belief and activity are found in U.S. society, there is ample evidence of a self-centered kind of faith. The effect of reading the Bible, prayer and meditation, and religious radio and television shows is much more often stated in terms of "it makes me feel good" (although this is certainly a desirable effect) than in terms of making people realize the need for repentance or the need to do God's will regardless of the cost. And additional survey responses suggest that the religiously-motivated behavior cited in the survey is more often in the nature of a passive "live and let live" kind of philosophy than in the nature of selfless and heroic action on behalf of others.

While these findings are unsettling and suggest the need for churches

The name of George Gallup has become a household word. President of the Gallup Poll, Executive Director of the Princeton Religion Research Center and Co-Chairman of the Board of the Gallup Organization, he holds a religion degree from Princeton University and is a committed Episcopal layman. Mr. Gallup lectures widely and serves on numerous boards. Among the books he has co-authored are America's Search for Faith, My Kid on Drugs? *and* Forecast 2000.

to continue to stress the obligations of faith as well as the rewards, it is important to note that most Americans readily admit that they do not come close to following the teachings of Jesus Christ, and at the same time, want their faith to grow.

Religion Seen Playing Greater Role

A growing number of Americans perceive religion to be playing a greater role in society. At the same time, however, actual participation levels, as noted, have remained remarkably flat over a period of several years.

The proportion who see religion gaining in impact on society is now more than three times the proportion recorded in 1969 when 14 percent said religion was increasing its influence and 10 percent said losing.

When this index was started, in 1957, 69 percent saw religion gaining influence on American life while far fewer, 14 percent, said losing.

Comparison of the current findings with those in 1970, when only 1 in 7 said religion was increasing its influence, shows the change to have occurred more or less equally among men and women, the various age groups, and by Protestants and Catholics.

The uptrend in those saving religion is increasing its influence parallels a slight upturn in those who feel that religion can answer all or most of today's problems—from 56 percent in 1984 to 61 percent in the latest survey. The current figure, however, is 20 points lower than that recorded in the first measurement, in 1947, when 81 percent said religion could provide answers for contemporary problems.

But Involvement Has Remained Constant

Despite the slight upturns since 1984 in those who say religion is increasing its influence and those who believe religion can answer today's problems, little change has come about over the last five to 10 years—at least until now—in the proportions of Americans who state a religious preference, say they are members of a church or synagogue, attend church weekly, say religion is important in their lives, and who express confidence in organized religion.

Following are the latest findings on religious involvement and practice, as well as confidence in the church:

Tom Dunham

Ninety-one percent of Americans currently state a religious preference, statistically the same as recorded regularly since the late 1970's.
Sixty-eight percent say they are members of a church or synagogue, statistically unchanged from the mid-1970's.
Forty percent of adults attend church or synagogue in a typical week, with little change since the mid-1960's.

Perhaps the most prominent trend at present is the intense search on the part of Americans-particularly young Americans—for spiritual moorings in life.

Fifty-six percent say religion is very important in their lives, representing little change over the last half-decade.

Finally, the percentage who express a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the church or organized religion—60 percent in the latest survey—has remained remarkedly flat over the last decade.

Signs of Renewed Interest

Although the basic religious involvement indicators—religious preference, church membership, church going, and the like—have remained basically stable, there are clearcut signs of renewed interest in religion:

An upturn is noted in participation in Bible study groups since 1978.

New religious ferment is noted on the college campuses of the nation. Attendance in churches and synagogues on college campuses has increased over the last half-decade, as has the proportion of students who say religion is very important in their lives. Courses on religion are drawing record numbers.

Americans want their faith to grow and religion to play a greater role in society.

Half of the nation's adults (51 percent) say they are more interested in religious and spiritual matters than they were five years ago, according to a 1985 survey conducted for the *Christian Broadcasting Network, Inc.* while 19 percent say less and 30 percent about the same.

Looking Ahead

What are the forces that are shaping religion in America as we move toward the turn of the century? Here are some of the more prominent trends being noted today:

An intensive spiritual search and a continuing desire for inward and spiritual growth, coupled in some measure with a rejection of the authority of churches.

William McKinney, reflecting upon the Unchurched American survey and subsequent surveys, comments: "There seems little question that, for the mainline churches, at least, individualism in religion reigns supreme. Questions of authority, discipline, community and order seem foreign."

William McCready (as reported by Kenneth H. Briggs in the *New York Times*) sees a major change in the nation's religious character with

Paul M. Schrock

Americans turning away from the dictates of organized religion and drawing upon spiritual feelings of their own to define their faith.

Other trends include:

A proliferation of religious groups to answer spiritual needs.
A growth in independent churches, reflecting a desire to be subject to local rather than national control.
Demographic changes, with an increasingly older population likely, some observers believe, to increase church membership and attendance in the immediate years ahead.
A blurring of boundaries between various faiths and denominations.
The influence of charismatics and Pentecostals which is being felt across denominational lines.
A growing interest in interdenominational and interfaith dialogue, although a continuing wide gap in understanding and dialogue separates churches on the "left" and those on the "right."
"A bottoming out" in the decline in the membership in the largest

Protestant denominations and a continuing growth in the Evangelical churches, notably Southern Baptist.

A continuing but less pronounced decline in the growth of the largest Protestant denominations but a growth and revitalization of the Evangelical churches, notably Southern Baptist.

The rediscovery of the small group as a method for nurturing and multiplying believers. Father James H. Bacik wrote in the *National Catholic Reporter* (May, 1984): "A growing number of people are finding their deeper religious experiences in more intimate personal interaction with others who share their fundamental outlook and values. He continues: "This is not surprising in a society characterized by impersonal bureaucratic structures, an increasing intrusion of governmental controls into life and the proliferation of depersonalizing technologies."

The "new activism." in a September 9, 1984 article in *The New York Times*, titled "Political Activism Reflects Churches' Search for a Role in Secular Society," Religion Editor Briggs writes about the efforts of churches to become a more potent social force:

"Armed with moral agendas, some conservative Christians who once felt excluded from the centers of political power are seeking to regain public backing for values they believe were wrongly stripped away by legislative and court action."

"At the same time, liberal Protestants, many of whom enjoyed close ties with official Washington in the past, are pushing a set of such issues as disarmament and improved social services that they consider neglected."

Roman Catholics, meanwhile, have found a new, independent voice through their bishops that is measuring United States nuclear arms strategy, domestic social programs and foreign policy in a more sharply critical manner."

"These developments stem from a common perception among Christian groups that the civil authorities no longer offer sufficient support for their beliefs and moral standards. Often their interests overlap as they separately seek to gain a stronger hearing in shaping public policy. The situation is urgent, they believe, because America is morally floundering and its values are up for grabs."

"The political activism is but one aspect of the churches' wider attempt to redefine themselves and their role in a more complex and secular culture."

The net impact of these forces will be felt in the immediate years ahead. Perhaps the most prominent trend at present is the intense search on the part of Americans—particularly young persons—for spiritual moorings in life.

What is prompting this search? One of the key factors is a need for hope in these troubled times of nuclear threat, a high crime rate, drug abuse, and other social problems. Accompanying this need, a note of desperation is sometimes found in the comments of survey respondents: Where else but to God does one turn in times like these?" Another factor is gnawing loneliness among Americans—greater loneliness, we find in surveys, than is found in many other nations—which is causing Americans urgently to seek supportive and dependable fellowship, and is reflected in the growth of small fellowship groups. Third, we find a disenchantment with modern lifestyles and with what is perceived to be a lack of rules and an anything-goes philosophy in society.

In a recent article in the *New York Times* ("America's Return to Prayer" Nov. 18, 1984), Religion Editor Briggs writes: "Spirituality is what people want . . . people are hungry for a direct relationship with God."

God Giving Birth

Word
made flesh,
a recurring
event,
again
and again
God
giving
consent
to an act
of creation,
to life's
liberation
within
every culture
all over the earth.
Wherever
love lives,
it is God
giving birth.

Miriam Therese Winter

Centering Prayer

There are times when I am with You
When there is no beginning or ending of time:
When the day is dateless
And the rhythm of time
Has ceased to record the hours
And the calendar, the days;
When no birds sing, but rest;
And no winds blow, but breathe.
And the air is drenched
With the white silence of love
And my fingers trace
The lineaments of Your Face.

Brother Thomas More Page, C.F.X.

Day of the Lion

We are tillers of a cold soil,
exiles in a harsh land,
Wondering what to do
till the lion comes.
We are singers of the sad songs,
dancers on the quicksand,
Wondering what to do
till the lion comes.

We are travellers on an old road
that seldom gives us rest,
Pressing toward the day of the lion.
We are wanderers in a wasteland,
a tapping in our chests,
Signals of the day of the lion.

There are flashes through the long wait
glances of the landscape;
Glimpses of the day of the lion.
There are footprints by the roadside,
tracks that the sun has dried;
May be the tracks of the lion.

There are kings from the east and west,
veterans of the long hard quest
Gathered for the day of the lion;
There are stories we have never heard
echoes of the single word
Spoken on the day of the lion.

Brother Thomas Renaud

Aids and the Passion of Jesus

Christ in Heaven, we pray to you for all those touched by AIDS—
We pray for those dying of AIDS, the horror and pain of whose death is so like your own:

—who often met death in the prime of life
—whose flesh is slowly crucified
—who know the loneliness of rejection and ridicule in their final days.

We pray also for those who, like Mary, dare to stand close enough to the suffering to experience brokenheartedness.

Finally, we pray for those who, like the disciples, so gripped by fear, run from rather than toward those suffering, even in the darkest and most needy hour.

We offer these prayers to you, who did not remain immune from the suffering, cruelty and death of our world. Amen.

Karen Ann Jaenke

Developing the Buddha Mind

KEVIN O'NEIL

The author recommends daily reading of this basic Buddhist text and feels that the best results occur when it is recited from memory. At the conclusion of each recitation one should meditate on the meaning of the text. If you have any questions write to the American Buddhist, 301 West 45th Street, New York, N.Y. 10036.

From beginningless time overpowered by *karma* and defilements, I have performed non-virtuous actions both those naturally wrong and those faults caused by breaking my vows, through the doors of body, voice and mind.

With great remorse I confess the accumulation of faults with a mind vowing never to repeat them again. To ripen and release all sentient beings I request that my teacher and all Buddhas turn the vast and profound wheel of the *Dharma*.

As long as there are sentient beings with folded hands I request that my teacher live forever, without passing into nirvana, to work for the benefit of sentient beings.

With deep respect I go for refuge until the heart of enlightenment is attained in my teacher, the Buddha, *Dharma* and *Sangha*. For the purposes of all sentient beings I generate the Buddha mind and lead the Bodhisattva way of life in order to attain enlightenment. May a gathering of compassionate Buddhas together with Bodhisattvas who are endowed with the clear wisdom eye, take heed of me this moment.

Blinded by ignorance and washed away by the fierce storm of my karma, I have fallen into the ocean of *samsara* and am overpowered by the sea of defilements.

May the wisdom of the *Dharma* protect myself and all sentient beings who are tormented by endless sufferings because of inferior minds. Although we have striven our utmost, the opportunity of finding liberation is small.

May our efforts rescue us from the ocean of *samsara* by extending our compassionate mind.

May we dispel the dark and thick cloud of ignorance, which is the base

of all phenomenal constituents and the cause of all improper mental states.

May we cut the creeper of self-grasping which is the source of all *samsaric* faults and the creator of all conceptualizations.

May we make use of our great power to transform our minds into the great wisdom destroying all pride and jealousy that currently stupefies, agitates and afflicts us.

May whatever dirt-like obscurations that have collected in our minds as a result of defilements from beginningless time be purified by the water of great wisdom.

May we dispel the strong hurricane of *karma*, created by the power of our own behavior.

May we pacify our sufferings, comprised of birth, old age, sickness and death which emerges from our *karma* and defilements.

May we recognize activities that deceive other sentient beings. May I turn away from meaningless activities such as seeking possessions which are without essence. May we dissolve the wheel of samsara, the hub which is the base of consciousness and the twelve links of dependent arising which is surrounded by the rim of suffering.

May we cease to have a mind reluctant to give to others while being attached to self and hateful.

May there always be great benefit for all sentient beings in every way, through my body, voice and mind.

May all inner and outer harm, obstructing attainment of perfect enlightenment be completely pacified.

May we always be spontaneously endowed with a spiritual preceptor, *dharma* friends, the noble *dharma* and suitable location to practice.

May I have a long life, devoid of illness and endowed with wealth and pleasing to all sentient beings in accord with the *dharma*.

May all Buddhas meet us at the time we leave life's constituents. I and all others, who are constantly stricken by the sufferings of *samsara* whatever faults have appeared, ask for forgiveness.

By collecting this virtue may we attain perfect enlightenment for all sentient beings. Throughout all of our many lives may we be endowed with a pleasing appearance, wealth, and power while being free from illness and full of life.

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Why do men and women in 59 countries read *Fellowship in Prayer*? Our readers tell us:

"This is a highly inspired, ethical publication. Love streams out of it!" "Part of my devotional reading every day." "I find your articles about different beliefs very interesting and informative. They make for better understanding among all persons." "It strengthens my faith in prayer." "The idea of interreligious understanding and cooperation is very dear to me. This is the way to peace." "I love it! It is well written by beautiful, loving people! It is delightful, inspirational, and uplifting. Thank you!"

If you, too, find *Fellowship in Prayer* "a joy and inspiration" to read, won't you take a moment to read and fill in the other side of this page?

Paul Walsh
President
Fellowship in Prayer

According to Your Faith

KATHLEEN DEYER BOLDUC

We welcome your account of your own "Transforming Experience" (a spiritual experience that had an outcome for the good of an individual, group, or institution). Please send it (typed and double spaced) to The Editor, Fellowship In Prayer, 291 Witherspoon Street, Princeton NJ 08542. Include a brief biography.

It happened four years ago, this life-transforming experience. Like a stone thrown into still water, it created a ripple pattern that still moves outward in my life today. Like so many events that end up shaping our lives, it began simply, with a phone call.

Chris, a woman from church, called and asked me to teach her to meditate. Wonderful! I was always looking for people to share my passion for meditation. And I had always admired Chris from a distance. I didn't know her well, but she struck me as a woman with a deep faith. I thought that we probably had a lot in common. As she talked, however, my excitement dimmed.

Chris told me that she had just had a mastectomy, and had months of chemotherapy ahead of her. She explained that she wanted me to help her with some visualizations for healing that she had read about in the Simonton's book *Getting Well Again*.

By this point in the conversation my stomach was in knots. What I couldn't tell Chris was that I had a terrible fear of breast cancer. At the impressionable age of nineteen I had taken a job in a small town bank, and replaced a woman who had died of breast cancer. She was just thirty-five, and she had left behind a husband and two young children. Daily I heard the details of her death. I suffered for her. I suffered for her husband and her children. But more than that, I feared for myself. Suddenly, my vulnerability as a woman was all too apparent.

"Chris, I would like to teach you to meditate. I'm not so sure about the visualization though. I don't know much about that," I hedged.

Kathleen Bolduc, who lives in Cincinnati, Ohio, specializes in writing on the faith journey. She credits her meditation practice with alleviating many of life's fears, as well as writer's block.

"Oh, no problem. I have the Simonton's book right here. I can drop it off this evening. It goes into a lot of detail on the visualization process. I just really feel that your experience in meditation would be helpful to me right now." She sounded excited.

I felt trapped. I wanted to do it. Meditation had turned my life around, and I felt led to teach anyone who was interested in learning. But I didn't know if I could handle this. Fears run deep, and this was one of my bigger fears. After thinking a moment, I told her to bring the book over, and that I'd read through it and consider it.

I read *Getting Well Again* over the next few days, and was amazed by what I read. It had been proven time and time again that we can take control of disease in our bodies through the thoughts in our mind. The Simonton's had had great success in the use of visualization along with traditional chemotherapy or radiation treatment with their cancer patients.

I began to pray. I prayed in earnest for several days. Lord, give me the strength to do this. Give me faith. Help me. Tell me what to do. Let me do your will.

The prayers did not help. Every time I sat down to pray my stomach knotted up. On Saturday, five days after the first phone call, I picked up the phone to tell Chris I just couldn't do it.

And then a strange thing happened. I had a very strong feeling that I was supposed to meditate. All along I had been praying, talking to God, filling my mind with my own thoughts and fears and wishes, instead of quietly listening for God's word.

I sat cross-legged on the bed, leaning against the headboard. Closing my eyes, I concentrated on my breathing, repeating my mantra slowly. "Maranatha . . . Maranatha . . . Come Lord Jesus . . ."

Gradually I sank deeper and deeper into silence. My heart rate and breathing slowed, until all I was conscious of was my mantra, and the peaceful stillness deep within myself.

Suddenly the stillness was broken by a voice within my mind. "Matthew 9:27." I was astounded. It happened again. Clearly, loudly. "Matthew 9:27." I was still very deep in meditation, and could not rouse myself quickly to look the passage up. I had no idea what I would find in Matthew 9.

Slowly, quietly, I brought myself back to the reality of my surround-

Cliff Moore

ings, and reached for my Bible, which lay by the side of my bed. What I found would change the course of my faith journey remarkably.

Matthew 9:27-29: "And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed him, crying aloud, 'have mercy on us, Son of David.' When he entered the house, the blind men came to him; and Jesus said to them, 'Do you believe that I am able to do this?' They said to him, 'Yes, Lord.' Then he touched their eyes, saying, 'According to your faith be it done to you.' And their eyes were opened."

For the first time in my life the scriptures spoke to me, personally. I wanted to shout, to dance, to burst into song. All along my fear had been standing in the way, and here God was speaking to me, saying, "have faith daughter. Put your trust in me. Believe, really believe, and I will set you free." I picked up the phone and called Chris.

Many more miracles were to occur in my relationship with Chris. I taught her to meditate, and in the process of finding symbols to use for her healing visualizations, our minds opened totally to one another. We needed to come up with symbols that would fit her personally, and decided we would both think about it for a week.

Coming together the next Saturday, we discovered that we had both come up with identical symbols: little men in white painter pants, sweeping the cancer cells out with brooms! To our utter amazement, we had both laughed at this crazy image, and had (unknown to one another) decided instead upon pac-man like figures that would devour the cancer cells! There could be no doubt that God was working through the two of us for healing and wholeness.

Today Chris is a healthy woman. The two of us are in a study group together, studying *A Course In Miracles*. We are learning that miracles are the norm rather than the exception. My eyes have truly been opened since the day the Lord spoke to me through the scriptures. I constantly remind myself that miracles abound, and can be witnessed and even performed "according to your faith."

The Monk in All of Us

DAVID M. DENNY

This second article in a series of three from the Spiritual Life Institute is a reminder that everyone has a serious call to the contemplative life. But solitary prayer and prayer in community are needed to bring into being "the monk in all of us."

This may come as a surprise to you but it is an inescapable fact of life: Each of us is in a special way a monk. Each of us has one primary relationship from which all our other relationships spring: The relationship with God. The professed monk simply cultivates that relationship in a particularly direct way.

Monastic life has been a source of tremendous vitality in culture since the sixth century. It provided a concrete expression of Gospel living, and monks contributed to the advance of the arts, sciences, and education.

Monks are very much at the heart of life, even if they are not very visible. The word "monk" comes from the Greek work *monos*, meaning "one." This has two connotations: The monk lives *alone*, and the monk attends to the *one* thing necessary to all life: God.

The life of the solitary monk, the hermit, has always been considered the purest expression of monastic life. But one must be extremely mature to be solitary; no one becomes an instant hermit. You must first demonstrate that you are a good community member, capable of self-sacrifice, and ready to contribute cheerfully to the common good.

Monasticism is an eminently civilized way of life. Civility is based on the practice of virtue, and monks work hard at developing the habit of virtue. Of course, the central virtue is love, so the monk must become a great lover of God, human beings, and all the created world. Our primary love is for God but it is crucial to understand that a monk enters the monastery for the sake of the world. We are there to intercede. We pray regularly for the specific needs of the global community. On the first Friday of every month, we celebrate a special liturgy that focuses on

Fr. David Denny is a monk of the Spiritual Life Institute, a contemplative order of men and women with communities in the mountain-desert of Colorado and the woods of Nova Scotia. An ordained priest for nine years, he serves the Nada Community in Colorado as Prior. If you would like to arrange a retreat or to order publications like Desert Call, *the Colorado community's Newsletter, write to Nada Hermitage, Box 119, Crestone, CO 81131.*

a particular world need, like priests imprisoned in China, the Afghan War, or people suffering in Brazil.

An Ecumenical Community

We engage in interreligious dialogue regularly and choose some of our readings at prayer from Buddhist, Hindu, Sufi, and Jewish traditions. "Catholic" means "universal," so it is impossible for a true Catholic to be parochial. We are madly in love with Christ, but he keeps challenging us to expand our understanding of who he is. We are utterly faithful to the teaching of his Church, but that teaching is not a dead letter—it develops and deepens over the centuries. We are convinced that this is still a pre-Christian age, and that we have barely begun to understand this inexhaustibly fascinating and irresistible God-man.

A Vowed Life

Monks live a vowed life. That means that before our superiors and our Bishop, we pledge to live lives of *poverty*, *chastity*, and *obedience*. Through these traditional monastic vows we face death now not only by relinquishing our hold on the sinful, selfish habits of our lives, but also by renouncing the best natural things in life: private property, marriage, and autonomy. No one naturally chooses this kind of extravagant venture. We do it because we are called by Christ, and there is no joy outside his will. Our life, if lived to the hilt, without compromises or dilution, serves as a sign that there is life beyond death, that there is ecstasy, fecundity, and intimacy available to us now, because Christ has conquered death and introduced the Kingdom of God, freedom, into the world. As St. Teresa of Avila, the great Carmelite mystic, said: "Solo Dios basta." God alone suffices.

Chastity

Sometimes people are surprised that men and women live celibate lives in community. It works! The only kind of physical expression of love between us is an occasional hug. In this age of sexual revolution, it often comes as a surprise that young men and women can be deeply integrated

Fr. David Denny

psychologically and sexually, and yet be celibate and chaste. It is only possible with wise spiritual direction and a deep, honest, undeluded and courageous life of prayer.

Obedience

People are also sometimes offended by the idea of obedience and erroneously think it means an infantile regression into dependency on outside authority. It is just the opposite! God is more you than you are and more me than I am. If I want to be true to myself, I must be true to God. I must obey God. As John Donne once wrote:

Take me to You, imprison me, for I,
Except You enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except You ravish me.

The freest, most original, wildest people in history have obeyed God, who is absolutely free, original, and wild. Christ is the great example. No one could buy or bamboozle him. He was unmanipulable and untrapable. He even slipped through the hands of death. Yet all he ever cared about or acted on was his Father's will.

Poverty

Monasteries have always been places of beauty and order. We love to share this atmosphere with out retreatants and guests, with those who come to our Sunday Masses, and those who come throughout the day and night to pray silently in our chapel. Human beings are never more marvelously human than when they are at prayer, for prayer is the highest human act. We are delighted to share our home as a house of prayer. Ultimately poverty is sharing, and this is our way of being poor.

A Day in the Life of a Monk

How do monks spend a typical day? Like anyone else, we have different kinds of days. In my community, we have three kinds of schedules: solitude, manual labor, and leisure. We spend two days every week and one week of every month in solitude.

Although the basic tone of monastic life is holy leisure, it is character-

ized by hard work. We live in individual hermitages, and most of us get up around 4:30 or 5:00 a.m. We all do approximately two hours of meditative reading a day and spend at least two hours in solitary meditation. That already takes up a fair amount of time! We pray together at 6 a.m. Our prayer includes three Psalms which we recite aloud and a reading taken from the Bible, from another religion's scriptures, or from great spiritual books, ancient and contemporary.

After prayer each monk prepares breakfast alone in his or her hermitage. Then we do the rest of our reading and meditation. At nine, the work day begins. I may work with Br. Ross and Fr. David on a design for the new guesthouse we hope to build this spring. Br. Ross spends a good deal of his day or maintenance projects ranging from roof repairs to cabinet making. Br. Thomas, a former I.R.S. agent, spends hours every day on bookkeeping and fundraising. I average five hours per week hearing confessions and giving spiritual direction. I also edit and illustrate *Desert Call*, our quarterly magazine. Then of course there's preaching.

Sr. Ceil is the circulation manager for *Desert Call* and our chief gardener. She also spends a lot of time counseling with guests. She recently went to Michigan to lead a retreat for some Mennonite friends there. Sr. Pat also spends considerable time with guests. She is our guestmaster and has the pleasure of trying to schedule all of our retreatants. She edits *Nada Network*, a newsletter we publish six times per year to connect the contemplative life of our monastery to contemplative life "out in the world." Sr. Susan does the layout for *Network* and is in charge of our bulk mailings. She assists Sr. Ceil with the gardening. Fr. David spends many hours per week taking care of our old cars, which we refer to affectionately as "the dinosaur fleet." Everyone takes turns answering the phone, cooking and doing the weekly town trip.

As prior of the community, a great deal of my energy is expended in concern over my "flock"! All part of being a spiritual father: my children never leave home, and new ones keep coming! But my job is easy compared to the burden carried by our Abbess, Mother Tessa, who spends herself by co-ordinating all of this activity and guiding us in our contemplative formation.

At 4 p.m. we all stop working and prepare for evening prayer at 5 p.m. After evening prayer we are solitary except for Wednesday and Friday evenings when we enjoy a festive meal together. At these meals we have

one strict rule: We *never* talk about business! At 8 p.m. the bell rings and we remain in silence until 9 a.m. the next day, except for our morning prayer. Most of us retire between 9 and 10 p.m. after reading and praying compline, the final prayer of the day.

Desert Spirituality

The pivotal Biblical experiences all occurred in the desert or on mountain peaks like the area where we live. The Jewish people were formed as a nation, and as a people of God when they ventured out of Egypt and into the Sinai. Moses received the Law of God on the mountain. The great Elijah, the spiritual founder and father of all Carmelites, met God on Mt. Carmel. He set the tone for the Carmelite order: He spent most of his time in solitude and silence on the mountain or in the desert, and then he came down into the cities to disrupt the status quo with his

creatively subversive wisdom and call the sheepish community back to their true, leonine identity as worshippers of Yahweh. John the Baptist also was a desert man. The desert sensitized him to the Advent of the Messiah. And Jesus' public life began after a sojourn in the desert, where he rejected temptations to seek economic and political solutions to the world's ills. In the desert, he was infused with the strength to persevere through the greatest miracle of all: the death of the God-man. And He longs to enter the desert of death with us, so that we will not be alone when we are carried into eternal life.

The desert is awesome and terrible, but it is also ravishingly beautiful. It is a place where we are shaken out of our ruts, humbled in the fact of vast, inexhaustible nature, and radically transformed by grace. No one can be smug in the desert. There is nothing to prop up our ego. There is just a fragile man or woman alone (*monos*) with the ultimate. Here we are harrowed and hallowed. Then we can be of service to our society.

When our guests come to make retreats, we hope to give them a taste of the biblical desert. The atmosphere must be radical, primitive, and natural enough for a certain kind of spiritual exposure and an experience of awe that can lead to a deeper understanding of God and what God demands of us.

Last night, as I took my sunset walk, I saw one of the retreatants walking leisurely in the cool evening. A few days earlier I had spoken to him by phone at his busy Washington D.C. office. Far from the madding crowds, he is drinking up the glory of the desert and our Sangre de Cristo Mountains. The strength and inspiration he gathers here will help sustain him through another year in the city, fighting for the rights of the defenseless.

Most of our guests are lay people. No one is "typical." We've had a cook from a soup kitchen in Denver and a movie actor from New York. We've had a young juggler from Saskatchewan and an elderly nun from Detroit. Car dealers, oceanographers, professors, fishermen, students, busy mothers and fathers all come for a sojourn in the desert. They come because of "the monk in all of us" who needs to remember and strengthen and deepen his or her relationship to God.

Mending Relationships

MARIANNA KANE NEAL

The effects of divorce on children and everyone involved can be devastating. As this writer underwent a particularly painful experience of divorce, she found strength through the ever-growing role in her life of faith.

Fifteen years ago I made a decision that I knew would change my entire life. But never did I consider how devastating some of these changes would be. Had I known I am sure I still would have made the same choice. I considered myself to be a mature well-organized person who was capable of handling any conflict but also was naive enough to believe that dilemmas only happen to other people.

I made the decision to marry a man who had custody of his two sons, who were then three and five. I had never previously considered the possibility of becoming involved in such a situation. Although several friends and even a lawyer talked to me, warning me of problems that could someday surface particularly as a direct result of the divorce, I really listened to them with closed ears. I knew these two boys would love me, and that I could be their mother. I had high ambitions of a life similar to a TV sit-com. Even though the boys' mother was alive, I had already begun to consider her as "the outsider" in my creatively orchestrated family unit.

In the beginning there was a lot of turmoil whenever the boys visited her. There's no place to really put any blame. If I were she I would have been devastated that another woman was raising my children. Inwardly I resented her not leaving us alone, my husband for ever marrying her (how dare he make such a disastrous mistake!) and the boys for liking to be with her. She was outgoing, I was more introverted; she was in so many ways what I had never been able to be, and especially she was their mother. She never deserted them as I had subconsciously expected her to do.

As I reflect on those early years I realize that my feelings, although rarely surfacing, played an important role in our daily situations. I often,

Marianna Neal, from Fairborn, Ohio, has masters degrees in counseling and theology.

for no apparent reason, became frustrated, and lost my temper with the boys. In my "ideal family" setting I found little peace and I didn't understand what was happening. I only knew that the hurt we all had to face every two weeks when the boys visited their mother was causing so much inner turmoil that although the boys appeared to bounce back rather quickly my own inner conflicts were creating havoc in my life and I was helpless in controlling it.

My husband, Bill, loved and supported me throughout this time as he searched for answers to my sudden outbursts and periods of depression. He'd often tell me that if I'd only tell him what was wrong he'd try to help me, but I didn't understand what was happening so there was no way to explain it to him. I blamed everyone else, often allowing an insignificant incident to become a take-off point in venting my frustrations.

Despite this undercurrent of confusion I loved the boys and cared for them, got involved in many of their activities, and really enjoyed being with them. As is often true, I spent more time with them and knew them in many ways better than Bill did. The boys and I had fun together whether we were watching TV, bike riding, going for ice cream or to the library. From the beginning of my marriage I depended a lot on my older son, Billy, to help me handle Scott. I felt a great affinity to Billy. He was introspective and much more like me than Scott who had an effervescent personality.

Had it not been for our ordeal I might never have felt a need for a personal God. But now that I have found God, life is fuller and I am happier than ever before. In God I have discovered a peace that I had never known.

When the boys were eight and ten Mark was born. I had never taken care of a baby and no doubt made a lot of mistakes. The baby demanded so much attention. Billy spent hours with me and the baby. He would hold him, read to him, and play with him from the moment he came home from school. Scott at the time was as we often said "being Scott." I remember often asking him to please quit acting his age for one year until I was better able to supposedly cope.

Although Mark's birth profoundly influenced all of our lives it was only one factor that contributed to our family's near disintegration. As I

Cliff Moore

look back there were signs of rejection when Billy was in junior high school. Perhaps I saw and ignored them, perhaps I attributed them to adolescence. As junior high ended they could no longer be denied. He would spend hours in his bedroom, refuse to eat meals with us, talk very little, and with or without my assistance have arguments with me that slowly eroded our relationship. I saw a slight improvement during his first year of high school but by his sophomore year he had withdrawn into an impenetrable shell. To further complicate our situation Billy was a student of mine. It used to hurt to have him treat me decently in the classroom and shut me out completely at home. It became a period of hurt inflicting pain in a vicious cycle.

For the first time in my life I realized what people had been trying to tell me so many years ago. I saw a sensitive child who had been severely affected by a divorce he never understood lashing out at those closest to him, afraid to trust anyone. I was unable to cope with what was happening. Every morning I had to face him in the classroom—teaching became unbearable. I felt as if I had completely lost control. I became involved in a variety of activities so that I was only home one night a week. I was willing to do anything to avoid what was happening around me. For

hours I would sit by the fireplace staring into space, confused, angry, just wanting to die. Once I went away for a week and nearly didn't return. I came back in worse shape than when I had left. Nothing could have really prepared me for the pain, the grief or the nightmares. I shut practically everyone out of my life. I repeatedly dreamed of falling into a deep pit and being unable to escape. It was a dream that I recalled having as a young child. I begged God to let me die. I was sure I couldn't survive another day wrapped in bitterness, despair, and anger. The pain of living was destroying me.

As I continued to beg God to let me die and sometimes when alone scream out at God in anger, a friend suggested that I begin writing in a journal as an outlet for my repressed and expressed emotions. Without much enthusiasm I decided I'd try. Words flowed easily. I discovered it was easier to write to God than to anyone I'd ever known. Eventually in my writing, in the depths of my greatest despair I felt a presence and a strength I had never known. I began reading the Bible, particularly the psalms. As I began to share my feelings with others they suggested books for me to read. These books helped me grow in my understanding of my God, my family, and myself. Now if I awoke during the night after a nightmare I would turn to my Lord. The God I had always taken for granted was suddenly becoming the center of my existence and my reason for living. Doors opened for me that I had not only closed but slammed. Instead of discovering God on a mountain of unbounding happiness I found Him in the desert I had created around myself.

We continued to have devastating times, times of separation when Billy first and later Scott left to live with their mother who was now remarried, happy and willing to help us repair our hurting children. The hurt we have all experienced and inflicted on each other will never completely be erased but we have survived with the help of family counseling and the support of our friends and relatives. And as our relationships are slowly being rekindled my faith in God assures me that in my sons I am discovering very special friends. We have become closer not because of any miraculous healing but because during the time apart we each grew in our understanding and appreciation of each other. We began to see a gradual change in Billy and I'm sure we changed as well. But it took time. We gave and continue to give each other the time that is needed to heal these relationships. Prayer helped us change and learn to better accept each other. Both boys eventually returned to live with us and our life

together continued to improve. God is visibly present in our lives in each other. Had it not been for our ordeal I might never have felt a need for a personal God. But now that I have found God life is fuller and I am happier than ever before. In God I have discovered a peace that I had never known. Through my crying, through my screaming out in despair, I came to know a God Who was deeply a part of my life, Who healed me and gave me a strength that I had lacked and Who, I realize, did indeed "hold me in the palm of His hand."

Everyone Can Perform Miracles

STEVEN KIRZ

I grew up in a house-hold in which little was ever said of religion. Even as a twelve-year-old, I barely knew that there was a difference between Judaism and Christianity, let alone what they entailed. But some of my earliest memories are of my talking with "God." It's understandable that an only child would talk with an imaginary friend, but this being was "God" in the sense of an all-powerful being to whom I could direct questions. I remember lying, cheating and stealing; but by the age of twelve, I recognized that when I did what I felt or had been taught was right, positive coincidences were more likely to happen in my life. I would be "lucky." This stood in dark contrast to the shame I felt when my favorite teacher caught me cheating on an exam in seventh grade. So, I had a conception of God and chose a more honest way of life because it seemed rewarding even in this life.

Death involved seeing one's whole life passing before one's eyes. In the final instant of life, one would make one's own judgment of that life—whether or not one had been good or bad. That final instant of judgment would not only be painful or joyous in its decision, but also eternal. That last thought would have no end and hence one would live forever in painful or pleasant self-judgment.

Much of the meaning I saw in life came from thoughts on the movie "It's a Wonderful Life." The movie concentrates on the importance of friends and the impact that one has on their lives. It made me feel that I could make a difference in this world, at the very least on a personal level. I made a conscious decision to live in such a way that everyone I met would be better off for having known me, for however short a period of time.

In high school history courses, I was constantly struck by the similarities in themes between my ideas of life and God and themes of major religions. I felt that I was on the right track and that a universality existed among religions.

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Coming to Haverford, a college with a strong Quaker background, my thoughts turned to discovering this universality, which I call spirituality. I'd often heard that to know oneself is to know God and the Quaker influence at Haverford emphasized this to me. In the broadest sense, then, my search was for God and I conducted it within myself. My search seemed undirected until I had a revelation. I use that word because I was struck by an idea which had nothing to do with what I was doing at the moment and which was so moving and profound that I felt moved to proclaim it out loud: "We are God, all of us put together make up God."

The more I thought about the implications of such a thought, the more sense it seemed to make. Jesus was not the son of God any more than anyone else and this is what he was trying to explain. That is, if one understands the part of oneself that makes up a part of God, one's soul, you will then understand God.

Everyone can perform miracles—just as the disciple Peter did. He was able to walk on water as long as he believed in his ability to do so, but the moment he doubted, he sank. Very few people believe such ideas and I think that it is this doubt which constitutes the "Fall" of human beings. The implications of such ideas are that all we need do in order to rise from ignorance, is to understand God through ourselves. It also means that without realizing it, our thoughts are literally our prayers and have some power. This makes sense to me as I consider the questions and ideas I developed as a child: Why does positive thinking really seem to have an influence on events?; why do prayers prayed and thought of by millions at the same time seem to have an influence on events?; Why does doing what is right lead to good things and doing what is wrong lead to bad things? Because we each hold part of the power of God within ourselves; the more of us who pray, the stronger the influence. If every human being prayed for a particular event to occur, it would occur because all of us put together make up that which is God. Individuals, then, also have a power even if it is not recognized. When it is recognized, when one uses his or her own power, he or she can perform miracles. When the power is not recognized, though the power is significantly weaker because it is not consciously tapped, one should think positively for fear of having a negative influence on events.

This view changed my views of death because it is clear that few people like Jesus exit. I concluded that if one fails to achieve this understanding

Steven Kirz

in this life, one's soul returns to attempt again. The soul, having insight into the infinite wisdom which we recognize as God's, it able to determine, upon one's death, the lessons that it still needs to learn in order to achieve self-understanding. With this knowledge, the soul sets up a life on earth for itself in the form of a new body and sets it up in such a way that it will be met by the challenges from which it can potentially learn those lessons of self-understanding that it still lacks. I write 'potentially' because we all have the free will to ignore challenges.

Decisions, tests, the hardships and problems of life, then, are potential gifts. The harder one tries to meet challenges head on, the deeper one's commitment to do right selflessly, even though to do wrong is easy, the greater the gift. The gift is a lesson in self-understanding that one needs to know to reach perfection. In *Illusions*, Richard Bach describes the soul as a script writer of movies, movies being the lives in which one learns lessons.

The impact of these ideas on my way of life are dramatic. I feel that life is good, a great gift with meaning. Our task is to become like God, because at our best that is what we are. It gives me a desire to bring happiness and comfort to all of those around me, and this brings me happiness. To learn more, I struggle to do what I feel in my heart is right; I avoid the easy way out of things because to do so means to ignore a challenge and a lesson.

I believe that we are (our souls are) the energy called love. Here, we might substitute the phrase 'intimate understanding' for love. We have discussed how to understand oneself is to love oneself and therefore God. To love another is to love him or her and again, God. The opposite of love, then, is misunderstanding or lack of understanding. This is actualized in the emotion of fear. We only fear that which we do not understand. In fact all emotions that are not born of love (understanding) are born of fear (misunderstanding): hate, jealousy, and grief for example.

Finally, it is clear that out of love comes a desire to give that love, a desire to act. Action is inherent in any form of love. Sin, then, is apathy through lack of love, or fear. Love is central to my thoughts now. It is the mover that makes us act against wrongs, act to help the needy, act to help those who cannot help themselves and act in our daily lives. God, I believe, is love.

Holy Thursday

ROBERT F. VER ECKE

"On the night he was betrayed . . ."

I remember once, when I was seven or eight, going into a "Fun House," at an amusement park. It was fun at first, with crazy mirrors that distorted your image . . . but suddenly I found myself in a darkened corridor, people pushing from the back, with nowhere to go, screaming, laughing, crying. I can still feel the suffocating feeling. "I can't breathe"; and then, the escape. I had found the way back into the light. A visceral memory of panic, darkness, suffocation.

How often this wonderful, beautiful world can turn suddenly into a place that is threatening, menacing, destructive.

The other day I went to the Cape (as is my Holy Week ritual) to walk on the beach and reflect on these days. It was beautiful, warm, sunny, tranquil . . . the world as it should be. And suddenly, an irrational trigger: I saw a wild beast on the beach, running toward me to devour me. I wanted to run to escape. Suddenly my rainbow-perfect world had become menacing, threatening to destroy me.

In reality, it was only a playful pup enjoying the beach. But it triggered in me the irrational fear that it might be more than that.

This world we live in—the psychic world within and the world "out there"—can change so suddenly for us. Life is filled with hope and promise, but a bright future can, in an instant, be emptied of any hope and reason, and future. In a split second, a critical accident can change the face of a person's life. The diagnosis of AIDS can shatter the possibility of a bright world. The taste of the good life, where everything is going your way, can suddenly turn to the taste of bitterness with the loss of a loved one, a severed relationship, or almost anything at all. This world that we believe is a friendly place can suddenly turn decidedly unfriendly.

It was that way with Jesus. His ministry signaled the dawn of the kingdom . . . hope-filled reconciliation . . . good news about God's kingdom. God is a loving parent who forgives, seventy times seventy times, who heals the broken-hearted, who gives sight to the blind. Jesus trusted this God whom he called "Abba," and he entrusted himself to human companions, the disciples, the twelve. There were many who could not hear his message. Through obstinacy and hardness of heart, they resisted his

message of forgiveness. "Who are you to forgive sins?" "By what authority do you speak?" They accused him. So many could not hear, and see, and understand. But at least *they* could, the twelve trusted companions, the ones with whom he shared the vision and the bread. Without, the world might be more and more dangerous, but within the "inner circle" of friends, he could trust.

Everytime we gather for the Eucharist we hear the words "on the night he was betrayed." These words sound a minor chord against the beautiful harmony of familiar words . . . "this is my body, given for you." The context of Jesus' last supper is frankly the darkness of night-evil. The trusted bonds of friendship are broken, fractured, ruptured, first by one "friend" and then by the others.

How is it possible that the most enduring symbol of covenant that we have—bread broken and wine poured-out—this most beautiful symbol of nourishment, life, and blessing, is born out of a night of impending death and human betrayal? It is the irony of our God to choose a symbol like that. This bread must be broken, fragmented, if it is to feed. The grapes must be crushed if they are to become wine. How is it possible that this "memorial meal" that constitutes us as God's people, as a community, could be born out of a night on which the community of Jesus and his disciples is left in shambles . . . "They all deserted him and fled."

The darkness of that night should not surprise us. The first Passover happened in the dark of the night; these, too, were people in flight, fleeing from the slavery of Egyptian bondage, fugitives of God, pursued by their enemies with no time to wait even for the leavening of the bread . . . tasting the bitterness of their slavery in the bitter herbs which were part of their meal . . . and the lamb, the innocent lamb, the blood of the lamb . . . the innocent victim slain so that the avenging angel might pass over and save this people, slaying only the innocent children of the Egyptian mothers and fathers. Even in freedom, there is human ruin. The darkness of evil that pits one people against an other. And the lamb. The innocent lamb . . . the blood of the lamb.

It is easy enough to "bless and give thanks" to God from our comfortable perspective here, thousands of years after the first Passover and two thousand years after the first Passover and two thousand years after Jesus' Passover with his disciples. Or is it?

We are still confronted with the darkness within ourselves and without, in our world. The world and the psyche can menace and threaten

Sergio Bonotto

us, frighten us to death with bad news. The bitterness we taste in life can spoil our taste for the future. Our own brokenness and fragile "handle with care" attitude can deter us from making bonds, when our trust is betrayed. Without and within, the forces of evil, Satan, call it what you will, the bottomless pit, the silent well, the corridor without light and air: these hells that we find ourselves in, all can be the context of this night. "On the night he was betrayed."

In the context of this night, the darkness, the fear, the betrayal, we can yield to despair and become our own enemies, or we can do as Jesus did. Jesus goes beyond betrayal: he looks the betrayer-friend in the eye and says, "go about your business." You have no power over me. He has already won the battle with darkness. Yes, he will see the face of evil again and again throughout his passion, but he will yield only to God: and not to the darkness.

He says in his last supper what he has said all along: *there is something more than the darkness that surrounds us and the demons that frighten us.* There is the God of the covenant, loving, faithful. There is this bread. There is this wine. There are the signs of a "new" covenant.

It is difficult to intellectualize and find adequate words to describe why I read *Fellowship in Prayer*. I first read it because it came to me in the mail, and being curious, I read it, expecting something entirely different. But how can I describe the feelings of my innermost self and the immediate reflection I saw and felt in the shared writings of *F.i.P.*? There was a sound so deep, so penetrating, so resounding, that it leapt from the printed page and enfolded me in its Divine embrace. It is always reassuring to experience the Divine working in so many people and so many varied forms. I am indeed grateful for having received and continuing to receive Fellowship in Prayer.

Sidney H. Stave; Salinas, CA

I have been reading with a great deal of pleasure and sometimes great emotion your fine publication for two years now and feel that I owe you a note of thanks for your contribution to my happiness and contentment.

It is not only the wonderful spirituality that is frequently so eloquently expressed in *FiP*. Nor is it only the moving stories and the uplifting thoughts that make me smile and yes, sometimes make me a little sad. Nor is it only the thought-provoking and marvelously challenging introductions and elucidations that you as editor provide. It is all of these plus the contented and even safe feeling that there is a community of dogma-free, spiritually awake and searching people with whom I am connected because of your—that's wrong, because of our—publication. As you keep up the wonderful mission, "may the Force be with you."

Roderick C. Hartington, III; New York, NY

Thank you for your wonderful and inspiring publication. Each issue is a retreat for the spirit & the senses. I particularly liked Wayne Simsic's article "Learning to See" in the issue of 12/88. Enclosed is a donation so that you can give a subscription to someone who cannot afford to pay.

Jim Peters; White Plains, NY

I am enclosing a check for a "subscription" to Fellowship in Prayer. I look forward to sharing the consciousness expressed in your theme: "For a world united in prayer."

Janet Manning, Chaplain; Unity Village, MO

Your last issue was superb! So Interfaith!

Rev. Edward P. Hogan; Rockaway Point, NY

Thanks deeply for your wonderful magazine. I am a Unitarian Universalist and your magazine is one of the few I've found that truly reflects humanity's universal spiritual heritage. I am currently studying for the UU Ministry at an ecumenical Christian seminary. I also practice Buddhist Vipassanna meditation and go on retreats regularly. Your magazine makes a great addition to my diverse spiritual life and also a wonderful prelude to my evening meditation.

Philip Harper; St. Paul, MN

I've been reading *F.i.P.* for about 3 years now, and have nearly every issue and read them when the spirit strikes me. I recently used some of the stories, hymns, psalms and readings at a practicum in which I was a group facilitator as part of obtaining a social work degree. The half hour meditation, nondenominational in its presentation, was a rousing success, and I feel this is a springboard from God to keep on using this with people I try to help with the counseling I do. So far, so good, and I pray it's going to continue.

James Moore; Genoa, IL

Thank you for the work you're doing to bring the world together.

Joy Van Gorder; Westbrook, CT

Your little book has brought me much joy this past year and a half. Thanks be to God. Buddhist, Catholic, Jew and many more, we are all brothers and sisters in God. Thank you!

Roberta A. Leon; Santa Ana, CA

I would like to begin by thanking you for your publication as it has become a very needed tool in my own spiritual program. I have been unable to find such good ecumenical works elsewhere. The rector at my Episcopal Church handed me a copy this past summer and warned me that I should subscribe because the copies at the church go quickly. I'm glad I did.

Lisa A. Baumgartner; Fort Worth, TX

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